

Why Are Best Practices Important?

Thomas L. Friedman, author of *The World Is Flat*, refers to a twenty-first century world that will be very different from the one in which we were educated. To survive in a new, globally competitive world, today's children will need creativity, problem-solving abilities, a passion for learning, a dedicated work ethic and lifelong learning opportunities. Students can develop these abilities through instruction based on Best Practice teaching strategies.

What Are Best Practices?

Best practices are an inherent part of a curriculum that exemplifies the connection and relevance identified in educational research. They interject rigor into the curriculum by developing thinking and problem-solving skills through integration and active learning. Relationships are built through opportunities for communication and teamwork. Best practices are applicable to all grade levels and provide the building blocks for instruction. Best practices motivate, engage and prompt students to learn and achieve. Students who receive a balanced curriculum and possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to transfer and connect ideas and concepts across disciplines will be successful as measured by standardized tests and other indicators of student success. Four best practices for teachers include teaching a balanced curriculum, teaching an integrated curriculum, differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs and providing active learning opportunities for students to internalize learning.

What Do Best Practices Look Like?

Classrooms that exemplify best practices are easy to detect as soon as you enter the room.

- Project materials and books are numerous.
- Students are engaged and focused on their work.
- Teachers often use collaborative and/or authentic tasks that place students at the center of the learning process.
- Seating arrangements are clustered, varied and functional with multiinstructional areas.
- Classrooms are activity-based spaces as opposed to places to “sit and get” lectures.
- Teachers are actively engaged with different groups and students are anxious to enlist visitors in their various tasks or assignments.
- There is a joyful feeling of purposeful movement, industrious thinking and a vital and vibrant atmosphere and environment.

Differentiate the Curriculum

What Is a Differentiated Curriculum?

A differentiated curriculum is one where teachers adapt the curriculum in different ways to meet the needs of all their students. The content taught, the process used, the product expected, or the physical factors of the environment created may be modified to help students achieve success. Task choices and flexible grouping may be used to accommodate background knowledge and interests of small groups or individual students.

Why Differentiate Curriculum in the Classroom?

- Provides access to opportunities for a rigorous curriculum based on the *NCSCS*.
- Provides opportunities for individual acceleration and remediation.
- Nurtures self-esteem and respect.
- Increases motivation through exploring individual interests and
- Builds relationships with students by knowing their strengths.

Differentiating Curriculum Helps Students:

- Master core concepts of the curriculum;
- Utilize their strengths, learning styles, and background knowledge;
- Set individual learning goals and
- Develop their personal skills and projects.

Provide Active Learning Opportunities

What Is Active Learning?

Active learning is a process in which the students are engaged in hands-on activities rather than passively receiving knowledge. Students interact with others to construct meaning from new ideas and concepts based on their background knowledge. Active learning is fastpaced,

fun and personally engaging because students have the opportunity to try things out, use their senses, ask questions and discuss with others. Assignments are designed to draw upon the skills and knowledge that students have or must acquire. Cooperative learning, problem solving, and project- based learning are active learning strategies.

Why Utilize Active Learning in the Classroom?

- Draws upon the pre-existing knowledge that students already have.
- Is essential for idea manipulation.
- Enhances understanding through cooperative learning and
- Augments learning through technology tools.

Implementing Active Learning Strategies Helps Students:

- Engage in higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis and evaluation;
- Study ideas, solve problems and apply what they have learned;
- Construct hypotheses and make decisions;
- Provide meaning and organization to experiences;
- Work collaboratively with others;
- Connect real-life work between school and what will take place in the rest of their lives and
- Address cultural influences and individual learning styles.

*adapted from NCPI